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Students' and Human Rights Awareness in Secondary Schools' Environment in Delta State

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Abstract

The paper reviewed the concept of human rights, possible origin and relevance to human society in general and the school system in particular. It evaluated people's level of awareness of these rights amongst students and teachers of secondary schools in Delta Central Senatorial District. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample size of students and teacher used for the study, in a descriptive survey design research. The instrument used was the three scale questionnaire, designed by the researchers to collect data for the study. The simple percentage was used as statistical tool for the analysis of data. The findings indicated among others, that there is limited awareness of the fundamental rights amongst secondary school students and teacher. The study recommended inter alia, that the state should seek to consciously promote fundamental Human Rights Awareness, by making the study of subjects which contains elements of the constitution as core, especially for those in the Primary and Secondary level of Education.

Introduction

The term 'human rights' stem from the recognition of rights that belong to an individual as a consequence of being human. The Encyclopedia Britannica (vol. 6), defined human rights as a wide continuum of values that are universal in character and in some sense equally claimed for all human beings. This advocacy has been reflected in the authorities over the years. The general agreement that all human beings are entitled to some basic rights marked the birth of the international and universal recognition of human rights. In the charter establishing the United Nations, all members were pledged to achieve 'universal respect for, and observance of human rights and fundamental freedom for all without distinction as for race, sex, language, or religion' and the UN has continued to affirm its commitment to human rights, particularly in such documents as the universal declaration of human right (1948), organization of African Unity (A.U) now African Union which in 1981 adopted the African Charter on human and people right, which has found expression in the universal acceptance of the concept of human rights. These are reflected in the writings of St. Thomas and Hugo Grottus, as well as Magna Carta, the petition of rights of 1628 and the English Bill of rights. The total picture is that human beings are endowed with certain eternal and inalienable rights.

Burnett (2007) defining "rights" posited that right are legal, social, or ethnical principles of freedom or entitlement while rights are the fundamental normative rules about what is allowed to people or owed to people, based on some legal system and social convention. While (Evin, 1977) saw rights as the contextual framework of social relationship which is seen in principle as a virtue of which claim is made in society on behalf of the individual, a group of persons or society as a whole, with strong sense of moral compulsion behind its and justified on the ground that unless it is recognized and acted upon, a perfectly possible well-being will failed to be attained.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that right is a social concept, in that one can only talk of right, where people are interacting with one another life in the school system.

Student's right is entailed within purview of the provision of the child's right as contained in the convention on the rights of the child UNICEF (2001). The convention is bound by the first legally international instrument to incorporate the full range of human right, civil, cultural, economic, political as well as social rights. In 1989, world leaders decided that children needed a special convention purposely for their circle because people under 18 years old often need special care and protection that adults do not. The leader also wanted to make sure that the world recognized that children have the same human rights too. The content of this provision is included in the convention, the rights to survival, to develop to the fullest, to protection from harmful influence, of abuse and exploitation, and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life UNICEF (2001).

Akiri (2003) had stated that students' rights are important in schools a view Atonuje (2011) agreed with and advanced that 'those rights which protect students i.e. those persons attending schools'. According to the writer, the level of rights accorded to students whether legally or by convention varies considerably around the world, such rights are subsumed within the constitutional provision for the fundamental human rights as contained in chapter four (section 33-44) of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria and those implied by the duty of the school as an institution to its client (student) (Nigeria constitution 1998). Therefore Atonuje (2011) was in agreement with Akiri (2003) when he stated that such rights include the right: to learn or be taught the right to belong to legally accepted voluntary associations of their choice in the school; the right to fair hearing on issues of conflict with fellow students.

Nwangwu (1984) stated that educational administrators and teachers knew the details of these fundamental human rights guaranteed by the constitution, because of the legality or otherwise of all education law, rules and regulation rest on their compliance with human rights provision. The author further posited that whether legal or by convention rules varied considerably across the world. Therefore, such rights are subsumed within the constitutional provision of Nigeria. Most teachers in our school system may neither have read the Nigerian constitution nor even the laws, rules and regulations, governing the schools and more especially on the probable consequences or implication of their actions in their day to day activities in the schools. Both Nwangwu (1984) and Akiri (1993) reconciled that the existence and operation of people in any system depend on reasonable rules, regulations and fair treatment by the operators.

Chinau (1995) and Atonuje (2011) equally observed that students rights violation takes several forms including imposition of excessive punishment (corporal punishment), denial of students access to learn in class sexual harassment by teachers of opposite sex, malicious maltreatment of student, imposition of illegal levies among others. Eyike (1984) also reintegrated that perpetration of rights violation in schools, was no doubt a problem to the educational system, as it is capable of marring the teaching and learning process.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher observed that during visits to some schools for supervision that in most schools students' rights were being violated in several forms. Excessive punishments (corporal punishment) were being melted out. Some of the students were denied access to learn in class and among others; illegal levies were being imposed on them which were capable of marring the

teaching and learning processes. But from such observations, it appeared that students were not aware of their rights. It was against this background that the study intended to find out if the students were aware of their rights.

In an attempt to guide the study, the following research questions were raised.

1. Have the secondary school students seen the 1999 Nigerian Constitution?
2. Are the students having their own copy of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution?
3. Are the students aware of their fundamental human rights as contained in the 1999 Constitution?
4. Are the students' rights adequately covered by the Constitution?
5. Are the students in support of the basic principle of children's right according to the UN's Convention?

Method of Study

A descriptive survey design was used in the study. It was based on data collected from the sampled schools using the modified three scale questionnaire designed by the researchers. Principals and teachers attitude was considered as the dependent variable while students' right was considered the independent variable. This is relied on the influence of the intervening variables that includes; gender, experience, professional training and others. The population of the study was limited to public secondary schools. The area covered was fifteen out of the hundred and forty six public secondary schools in Delta Central Senatorial District. The population of study was stratified in terms of location of schools, whether urban or rural, teachers and students. The instruments utilized in the work is titled "Principals and Teachers Attitude towards Students' Rights questionnaire" made of sections A and B. The researcher applied basic precaution to ensure face and content validities establishing general validity of the instrument. The reliability coefficient was established at 0.76 using the Cronbach's alpha reliability concerned with internal consistency of the instrument. A simple random sampling technique was used in designating the fifteen schools and the number of teachers and students from which responses to the questionnaire were elicited. Five teachers and ten students responded to the questionnaire, making a total of fifteen responses from each school. On the whole, a total of two hundred and twenty five questionnaire were distributed, the data. Collected were analyzed based on the five research questions.

Research question 1: Have the secondary school students seen the Nigerian constitution of 1999?

Table 1

Students and Teachers Who Have Seen the Nigeria 1999 Constitution

Class of respondents	Mode of response	No of response	Of score	Total response	Percentage
	Agreed	25	16.66	150	100

Students	Disagreed	140	80	150	100
	Undecided	5	3.33		
	Agreed	40	53.33		
Teachers	Disagreed	25	33.33	75	100
	Undecided	10	13.34		

Data on table one, shows that the number of students who have seen the Nigerian 1999 constitution, was 25 out of one hundred and fifty (150) responses, representing 16.66%. A total 120 out of 150 students indicated that they have not seen the 1999 constitution. This number represents 80% of the total students' responses.

However, only five 5 showed that they were undecided on the issue. On the other hand, the teachers' column indicated that 40 out of a total of 75 responses agree to have seen the 1999 Nigerian constitution. This figure represents 53.33%. A total of 25 which represents 33.31%, have not seen the 1999 Nigerian constitution, meanwhile, 10 which represents 3.33% are undecided on the issue. In all, it could be deduced from the above results, that while more students are unaware of the existence of the Nigerian constitution, most teachers have seen the constitution. Therefore, the issue of fundamental right awareness in Delta Central Senatorial Districts Secondary Schools could be said to be more favourable to be teachers, 55% of whom have seen the constitution, where as 80% of the students are ignorant of the existence of the constitution, let alone knowing the provision of the fundamental human rights contained in it.

Research Question 2: Are all the students in possession of their own copy of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution?

Table 2

Students and Teachers Who Have Seen the Nigeria 1999 Constitution

Class of respondents	**Mode of response**	**No of response**	**Of score**	**Total response**	**Percentage**
	Agreed	15	10.1		
Students	Disagreed	130	86.6	150	100
	Undecided	5	3.3		
	Agreed	15	20		
Teachers	Disagreed	60	80	75	100
	Undecided	0	0		

Data on table II showed 15 students which do represent 10.1% of the respondents who agreed to own a copy of the Nigerian constitution, while 130 students, representing 86.6% of the responses who own a copy of the constitution. The number of undecided was 5, representing 3.3% of the responses. The above figures clearly indicate that majority of students and teachers have no copies of the constitution.

Research Question 3 : Are the students aware of their fundamental human rights as contained in the Nigerian 1999 Constitution?

Table 3

Students and Teachers Who Aware That They Have Rights in the 1999 Nigeria Constitution

Class of respondents	Mode of response	No of response	Of score	Total response	Percentage
Students	Agreed	50	33.3	150	100
	Disagreed	95	63.4		
	Undecided	5	3.3		
Teachers	Agreed	70	93.4	75	100
	Disagreed	0	0		
	Undecided	5	6.6		

Data on table III showed that 50 responses represents 33.3% of the sampled students who are aware that they have rights as contained in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, the data also showed that 95 responses, which represents 63.4% of the students are not aware of the fact that they have rights in the constitution. However, infinitesimal figures of 5, representing 3.3% are undecided.

Data on teachers' response showed that 70, representing 93.4% are aware of their fundamental human rights as contained in the 1999 Nigerian constitution. There was no response on those who disagreed, but 5, representing 6.6% were undecided on the issue.

The figures showed that while more students are unaware of their rights in the constitution, a good majority of teachers are aware that they have rights contained in the 1999 Nigeria constitution.

Research Question 4: Are the students right adequately covered by the Constitution?

Table 4

Students and Teachers Who Think That Their Rights Are Adequately Covered by the Constitution

Class of respondents	Mode of response	No of response	Of score	Total response	Percentage
Students	Agreed	100	6.66	150	100
	Disagreed	40	26.6		
	Undecided	10	6.8		
Teachers	Agreed	70	93.4	75	100
	Disagreed	0	0		
	Undecided	5	6.6		

Data on table IV showed that 100, representing 66.6% of students' response think that their rights are adequately covered by the 1999 Nigerian constitution, while 40, which represents 26.6 presented think otherwise. Total of 10 responses, which represent 6.8% are undecided on the issue. The teacher response indicated that 70, representing 93.4% think that their rights are

adequately covered by the constitution. Nevertheless, there were no disagreements while 5 responses, represent 6.6% as undecided on the issue. From the data above, it is clear that majority of both students and teachers think that their rights are adequately covered by the 1999 Nigeria constitution.

Research Question 5: Are the students in support of the basic principle of children's rights according to the United Nation convention?

Table 5

Students and Teachers Who Support the Basic Principles of Children's Rights

Class of respondents	Mode of response	No of response	Of score	Total response	Percentage
Students	Agreed	140	93.4	150	100
	Disagreed	0	0.0		
	Undecided	10	0.6		
Teachers	Agreed	30	40	75	100
	Disagreed	32	42.6		
	Undecided	13	17.4		

Data on table v showed that 140 which represents 93.4% of students responses, supported the principle of children's rights according to the UN convention. There were no disagreement, but 10, which represent 6.6% where undecided. Data on teachers' response showed that 30, which represent 40% of the figure, were in support of child's right according to the UN, convention, while 32, representing 42.6% were not. However, 13, which represent 17.4% were undecided on the issue. The data on the research question clearly indicated that most students support the principle of child's right. A good number of teachers supported the principle, while a slight majority disagrees with the principle.

Discussion of Results

The result of this study revealed that more students are unaware of the existence of the Nigerian Constitution. This is unlike teachers' majority who indicated that they have seen the Constitution and are aware of the existence. Findings on whether they own the 1999 Constitution indicate that majority of the teachers and students have little no knowledge of the fundamental Human rights as entrenched in the Constitution.

The constitution of any nation as it is the highest legal frame of reference in regard to law and rights including Education laws. Akiri (2003), Enaohwo and Eferakeja (1989) observed that education laws are defined as a range of rules and regulations guiding the operation and administration of schools. The Federal Constitution of Nigeria in 1999 contained the fundamental human rights of all Nigerians including the students as specified in chapter four subsections 32-44.

The chapter covers provision on the fundamental human rights which includes right to life, dignity, liberty, fair hearing, private and family life, thought, conscience and religion, freedom of

expression peaceful assembly and association, movement, freedom from discrimination and right to own property (Akiri, 2003).

To avoid the breakdown of law and order, violence, anarchy and indiscipline in the school setting, it is important that both students and teachers need to know their fundamental human right as stipulated in the Constitution.

The fundamental human rights are equally referred to as Bill of rights, civil rights and the civil liberties. These are legal and constitutional protestations of individuals against government and other institutional powers including the school environment.

Findings on the awareness of the fundamental human rights show that many of the students in secondary schools in Delta State are not aware of their rights. Despite that these are entrenched in the Constitution, a good number of teachers are aware that there are human rights in the 1999 Constitution.

It is very necessary that education teachers and administrations constantly examine their actions and inactions in schools. This is in the light of these rights especially in the area of students discipline so official do not infringe on the students' rights.

Nwagwu (1987) alluded to the need for education workers to have knowledge of the constitutional rights of the citizens including students. The author stated that the interest in these fundamental human rights stem from the constitutionality and legality of all laws, rules and regulations. Today, government and educational authorities may produce periodically such documents the organization and administration of the school system may use to operate.

Therefore, Peretomode (2001) indicated that punishments are responses by school officials to students' discipline problems. Hence, such chastisements are reasonable, constitutional and lawful in order to avoid possible charges of assault, battery, inhuman or brutal treatment or man-slaughter as the case may be. In apportioning punishment, students' rights need be put into consideration. This can be done only when the teachers and administrations are aware of the rights of the students.

Findings on whether the students are adequately covered showed that majority of both students and teachers indicated that the rights are adequately covered by the 1999 Nigerian constitution.

The result on the findings on whether the students and teachers support the basic principle to the child's right according to the UN convention which showed that majority of the students and a majority of the teachers are in support of it.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the result of the study the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. The students book list should include a copy of the Nigerian Constitution and generally school rules as a matter of compulsion, all teachers and secondary school administration should be made to own a copy of these documents.

2. Subjects such as civil and social studies included in the secondary schools curricular especially the junior classes. (JSS 1-3).

3. To create students' right awareness, sermons and workshop should be organized for teachers, administration and students by education agencies.

4. Students' rights should be taken into consideration in the formulation and execution of educational policies.

5. The State should seek to consciously promote fundamental human rights awareness, by making the study of subjects which contains elements of the constitution as core, especially for those in the primary and secondary level of education.

6. There should be more advocacy in publicizing the Nigerian constitution and all its amendments, so as to make it available to schools and the general public.

7. Civic education as already introduced into the school curriculum should be mandatory especially in the basic school, to enable children to imbibe the knowledge of their rights early enough as children.

8. Teachers should periodically be given orientation through seminars and workshops on human right and what constitutes their violation, with emphasis on international acceptable best practices on the subject matter.

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